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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TASHKENT 000376

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN AND INR

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SUBJECT: NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR AND DEFENSE MINISTER

TELL DAS FEIGENBAUM NOTHING MUCH NEW

REF: TASHKENT 296 (NOTAL)

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Brad Hanson for reasons 1.4 (B,D).

11. (C) Summary: National Security Council Secretary Murod Ataev and Defense Minister Ruslan Mirzaev told SCA DAS Evan Feigenbaum that they value cooperation with the United States. However, Ataev said, Uzbekistan can now do without U.S. assistance in certain areas and neighborhood committees can do many jobs that U.S.-funded assistance organizations have done in the past. He said that U.S. organizations must follow Uzbek law. DAS Feigenbaum countered that NGOs are crucial to the implementation of U.S. assistance programs, and noted the need for results-oriented cooperation. Ataev said the GOU might increase from ten to twenty the number of agreed upon mil-to-mil engagement activities for FY 07, while acknowledging that this still reflected a significant drop-off from years past. Participants discussed the case of Human Rights Watch-staffer Umida Niyazova, as well as GOU harassment of Embassy Tashkent FSNS. Feigenbaum offered specific suggestions to expand the bilateral security relationship. He also offered concrete ideas for how the GOU might be more supportive of international efforts to help stabilize and reconstruct Afghanistan. Ataev and Mirzaev, both veterans of the Soviet intelligence and armed services in Afghanistan, did not respond directly, but busily took down the points to relay up to President Karimov. Ataev plays a central role in advising Karimov. His rhetoric in this meeting, disappointingly, showed little movement in Uzbek policy beyond expressions of a willingness to cooperate. End summary.

REVIVING BILATERAL DIALOGUE, BUT PROBLEMS WITH FSNS CONTINUE

12. (C) On March 1, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Evan Feigenbaum told National Security Council Secretary Murod Ataev and Defense Minister Ruslan Mirzaev that he had chosen this time to come to Tashkent after agreement had been reached with the Government of Uzbekistan (GOU) on permanent staffing at the Embassy in

an effort to refocus the relationship on the way ahead. Feigenbaum hoped issues of accreditations and long-term visas for permanent staff were behind us. However, he felt he had to raise with Ataev and Mirzaev GOU harassment of Embassy's Uzbek FSN employees, noting that we had noticed increased harassment by Uzbek authorities of our FSNs and that we expected it to stop. (NOTE: Some Embassy FSNs have come under increasing pressure from Uzbek authorities, who refuse or delay to issue exit permits, refuse to return or retain their passports for lengthy periods of time, single out particularly active or public FSNs for military service, or, in one case, pressure an FSN to resign from the Embassy, etc. End Note.) Ataev responded that the Embassy should raise such issues with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) for the GOU to consider.

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL RELATIONSHIP, PERHAPS GREATER MIL-TO- MIL ENGAGEMENT

13. (C) Feigenbaum said Uzbekistan should hear directly from the United States, not from third parties or the newspapers, what we stand for in this part of the world. He noted that the United States intends to pursue multi-dimensional relationships, including with Uzbekistan, in support of Central Asian sovereignty and independence. He highlighted past successes, including cooperation on Afghanistan, non-proliferation programs, and the 40 joint events conducted annually at the height of the Military-to-Military program. He also pointed out challenges, noting that only 10 military-to-military events are planned for 2007. Ataev responded immediately on the military-to-military program, stating that the plan would be raised to 20 events this year and had been as high as 60 events a year in the past. (Comment: The Ministry of Defense (MOD) subsequently informed our Office of Military Cooperation (OMC) Chief that MOD now wanted to participate in 20 events in FY 07. However, the

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vast majority of the additional ten events to which they now agree involve sending Uzbek military staff to the United States. OMC is looking to suggest other, more bilateral, kinds of events to gain belated MOD acceptance. End Comment.) Feigenbaum stressed a desire to eliminate barriers to cooperation in areas such as education and trade that had lagged behind their potential because of obstacles from the Uzbek side. He noted that the two sides continued to have differences, including about past events that could not simply be forgotten. To move forward, he suggested aiming for concrete results.

ON RIVER BOATS AND CUSTOMS TRAINERS

14. (C) Feigenbaum told Ataev and Mirzaev that the Government of Uzbekistan could take several immediate steps to eliminate obstacles to cooperation on security issues. Referring to the recent delivery of 14 riverine patrol craft to Uzbek Border Guards at Hayraton, Feigenbaum asked that there be a joint dedication ceremony to mark this significant achievement, perhaps during the Ambassador's upcoming trip to Termez. Ataev responded that there would certainly be a dedication ceremony in which the Ambassador could most certainly participate. He promised the MOD would respond to the Embassy on dates for the ceremony. (NOTE: Discussions are still continuing between the Embassy and MOD and MFA on the details. End Note.)

15. (C) Feigenbaum also raised the problem of a U.S. Customs Service training team, invited by the GOU to conduct interdiction training at the river and rail ports in Surkhandarya Province, that had been denied access to the river port in Termez. (NOTE: Two hours after the meeting, our Customs trainers called from Termez to say they now had access to the Hayraton river port. End Note.)

ON REGIONAL STABILITY, ESPECIALLY AFGHANISTAN

¶6. (C) Other immediate areas of cooperation, Feigenbaum said, could be regional efforts to curb terrorism and trafficking in persons, and a renewed dialogue on Afghanistan. Ataev, who served in Afghanistan and remains especially interested in that country, affirmed Uzbekistan's interest in cooperating. He said that his colleagues at this meeting, including Mirzaev and several uniformed officers, had actively participated in bilateral cooperation programs in the past and appreciated their value. He also cited counternarcotics as a promising area for continuing cooperation. He expressed the hope that U.S. counternarcotics money in Afghanistan "won't simply go into bureaucrats' pockets."

¶7. (C) Feigenbaum noted Ataev's concern about Afghan-origin narcotics. He summarized for the Uzbeks the Administration's 11 billion dollar supplemental request for Afghanistan, as well as counternarcotics efforts with Afghan and international partners. The DAS then suggested that the GOU be more proactive in supporting efforts to help Afghanistan stabilize and reconstruct. Specifically, Uzbekistan could choose to participate at conferences on Afghan stabilization and reconstruction, or participate at a more senior level by sending officials from Tashkent, or participate more substantively. Uzbekistan might also choose to supply additional electricity to northern Afghanistan from its electrical grid. Afghanistan was in dire need of electricity and her neighbors north of the Amu Darya could do much to help fill that need. Ataev did not directly respond to Feigenbaum's suggestions on Afghanistan but he and Mirzaev and the MOD notetakers in the room were busily scribbling it all down to report up the chain to President Karimov. (NOTE: Both Ataev and Mirzaev have a long history with Afghanistan. Ataev, who specialized in Afghan studies at Tashkent's Oriental Studies Institute and who speaks Dari, served as a Soviet intelligence officer in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation. Mirzaev served with the Soviet Army in Afghanistan and once remarked to us that he knows the Afghan topography well at the ground level. Ataev, in

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particular, advises President Karimov on Afghanistan. End Note.)

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH STAFFER UMIDA NIYAZOVA

¶8. (C) Ataev then turned to contentious political issues. Turning to education and NGOs, Ataev said it is important for NGOs to observe Uzbek laws. Through "cautious movement," he said, Uzbekistan wants to avoid "chaotic situations" such as that in Kyrgyzstan, and to prevent conflicts, such as the past civil war in Tajikistan or the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Defense Minister Mirzaev echoed Ataev's fear of a civil war, citing the threats of "ideology and radicalism" and Uzbekistan's desire to stand on its own two feet. He said, "We don't want someone dictating to us; we want assistance." (Comment: Interestingly, this was Mirzaev's only comment during the hour long meeting. End comment.) Ataev also raised the case of Umida Niyazova, an employee of Human Rights Watch whose computer was confiscated at the Tashkent airport and who was arrested (reftel). Feigenbaum responded that, of course, the U.S. was concerned about her welfare, not least because she worked for a U.S.-based human rights organization. He added that his email address in Washington was publicly available and he had received more than a dozen emails regarding Niyazova's arrest. This was a high profile case and it was hard for us to understand why she had been arrested. (Comment: It was curious that Ataev raised a specific human rights case before Feigenbaum could; perhaps Ataev thought he could preempt the case by taking the lead on it. End Comment.)

IT'S THE NGOS, STUPID

¶9. (C) DAS Feigenbaum addressed Ataev's concerns on NGOs. He explained that differing perceptions of their role present

obstacles to bilateral cooperation, particularly in the areas of economic development and education, in which Uzbekistan has stated an interest. He acknowledged the need for organizations to abide by local law, but noted that several organizations had been closed over minor administrative infractions with no recourse or opportunity to address or correct problems. He asserted the U.S. belief that stability is facilitated through an open society which allows citizens the opportunity to positively express themselves, rather than through a closed society, in which some may even turn to violence to express their grievances.

¶10. (C) Ataev asserted that Uzbekistan can be self-sufficient in certain areas where the United States had assisted in the past. For example, Uzbekistan and the United States had cooperated in the past in intelligence sharing, counterterrorism, and development of civil society. Now, however, Ataev argued that the Uzbek system of mahallas (neighborhood-level governance bodies) can handle many functions of nongovernmental assistance organizations, as well as prevent the "anarchy" that accompanied Kyrgyzstan's government turnover in 2005. He also highlighted the guiding role of Uzbekistan's new National Association of Nongovernmental Organizations.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Ataev concluded, "We have seen the historical results of cooperation and look forward to it in the future." President Karimov is ex-officio Chairman of the National Security Council. Ataev, as Secretary, is the second highest ranking member. The Council plays a central role in advising the President, and it may be the origin of many Uzbek policies that have marginalized the U.S. presence over the past two years, particularly the expulsion of NGOs and the cutoff of military and intelligence cooperation. The Defense Ministry plays a decidedly subordinate role, as demonstrated by Minister Mirzayev's relative silence at this meeting. Ataev's rhetoric showed little change from recent pronouncements, and heralded no substantial moves forward in the relationship, although he did frequently profess an interest in expanded bilateral cooperation. Nevertheless,

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the meeting was a welcome opportunity to make our case for a better relationship. Ataev's comments on increasing mil-to-mil engagement and events, and the subsequent MOD follow-up, show a little bit more GOU interest in engagement in the security area. And we believe Ataev and colleagues would welcome additional, substantive discussions, including briefings on Afghanistan, if given the green light from President Karimov to engage more with the U.S. on Afghanistan.

¶12. (U) DAS Feigenbaum cleared this cable.
PURNELL